

TESTIMONY OF SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

REGARDING H.B. 6380

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

February 28, 2011

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, Sen. Maynard, Rep. Willis, and members of the Committee. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Alison Gilcreast and I am currently pursuing a graduate degree in public health at Southern Connecticut State University. I am here today on behalf of the Connecticut State University system as a student representative. I have reservations regarding the proposed budget House Bill 6380, which would consolidate the university system and cut funding to the state schools.

Currently, under the proposed budget \$143.5 million will be cut from public higher education funding over the next two years. Public funds are essential to maintaining low fees and to offering quality higher education. Public funds are indispensable to support research and it is essential to the student-centered instruction associated with the liberal arts. I do not ask for money and I do not ask for hand outs, but while I am obtaining a higher degree I do expect my institution and my professors to support my academic efforts by offering assistance and resources in my studies and in my research.

The faculty and staff at Southern Connecticut State University has been top notch. When I call the Director of Financial Aid, he responds within 24 hours. My professors go above and beyond to assist me in my studies, as well as ease the stress of work/life balance. I know my professors are not teaching because of the money, if that was the case they would be teaching at a private institution. Rather my professors teach here because of their aspiration to expand the public health workforce and to assist in creating jobs for this emerging profession. I am proud to earn my masters at Southern Connecticut State University and I enjoy recommending people to attend Southern Connecticut State University as a student. Currently, there are 3 programs in the state for public health and Southern Connecticut State University's program provides the best value because of the cost. If we centralized the university system, I am afraid this program will not be given the support it needs to flourish.

Every time the state of Connecticut cuts funding to state schools the tuition increases. I chose Southern Connecticut State University for my graduate degree because I could not afford a private institution. I received my undergraduate degree at a private school in New London, CT, which has left me with a large amount of student loan debt. After I graduate in May, I will have over \$90,000 in student loan debt in an economy and state that cannot promise me a job.

I understand cuts have to happen and sacrifices have to be made by all of us, but if we decrease access to these wonderful institutions and we keep cutting back funding in higher education, we cannot have an adequately trained workforce in Connecticut. Connecticut residents should have access to affordable, quality higher education that is effective, efficient and equitable. These suggestions proposed will hinder that goal. The bottom line is, if we make higher education too difficult to access we, as a state and a nation, will fall farther behind our competitors. Job creation and job retention begins with an educated and trained workforce and that begins at Southern, Central, Eastern and Western Connecticut State University.

For additional information on my position on the budget issues related to higher education and, please contact Alison Gilcreast at 860-395-9202, e-mail sailing395@comcast.net

